*30 Day Rowing Challenge*

**Introduction**

To which sick sadomasochistic part of my brain I owe thanks for this one I have not yet ascertained. When I do finally find out I’ll be sure to extend much gratitude and then promptly pay to have it lobotomised. This was a nasty challenge and it certainly is not for the faint hearted.

Before we get into the knitty gritty of the particulars I’m first going to briefly bore you with the details of how I conceived this challenge. In the beginning, about two days before I was set to smash a Champagne bottle over my rower and launch it onto the wide open ocean, I’d settled on 30 days of ten thousand metres. But it quickly dawned that this would be really boring. Not only boring but monotonous, mundane and maddeningly mind-numbing. Also, it would reflect poorly on my powers of creativity. ‘Truly,’ you would be thinking (and rightly so), ‘is this all you can come up with? By god you must be a singular dullard!’ To which I would have to concede.

So, I ruthlessly ripped up my original idea and staggered dejectedly back to the drawing board. It wasn’t until the wee hours of the morning, dawn began spreading her tawny gold and purple flecked fingers across the sky, that I experienced a flash of insight. Before that moment I was thinking: ‘How can I fancy things up a bit? After all, I don’t want the one or two people that might stumble on this challenge in the ‘blogosphere’ to think that I’m bereft of brains.’ Then a polysyllabic pounced into my mind. Pyramid! ‘Yes that’s it, that’s it! I shall organise the distances into a pyramid format.’ And that’s precisely what I did.

My first thought was to increase the daily distance by one thousand metre increments. However, when I crunched the numbers I realised I’d be halfway across the Atlantic before the third week. I then, rather reluctantly, reduced the distance to 500 metre increments. It was at that moment when this challenge was born. On the first day of the challenge I would row a paltry 500m then a 1000m on the second and on the 30th and final day . . . !

**Rules**

* Complete each individual row set following the order as per the tracker sheet (see Appendix A for 30DC Row Tracker).
* Complete the row tracker as you progress through the challenge ensuring to log your time and average 500m pace.
* You cannot split any of the distances down completing, say, half in the morning and half in the evening.
* You are not permitted to stop and rest during any of the row sets. Once you begin you must continue on until the distance is completed.
* You cannot have a day off once you embark on this Odyssey.

**Challenge Modification Suggestions**

Because this challenge is physically gruelling I have produced a list of *Modification Suggestions*. The idea behind these modification suggestions is to make this challenge more accessible to a wider audience. After all, the aim of the 30 Day Challenge initiative is to provide people with methods of making improvements to their lifestyle – whether that improvement is health orientated (30 Days A Vegan), fitness orientated (5 Mile Run and this challenge), or self-discipline (5am Wake Up and Spending Fast). So with this in mind I have compiled a list of ways which this challenge could be modified so as to bring it within range of your current level of physical fitness. Remember though: the modification suggestion that you select should still pose a challenge.

* Instead of climbing in increments of 500m, reduce it to 250m. By doing this each row set will be half what it is on the tracker (see Appendix A) and the overall distance covered across the 30 days equates to about 125,000m, which is still some going.
* Work through the distances with a partner. There are numerous ways you can do this. I have identified three: 1) split each distance into 500m chunks and together, taking turns on the same rower, complete the set (this works best for larger distances); 2) split each distance in half and, on separate rowers this time, work alongside each other competitively; 3) you complete half the distance, whilst your partner stands at your side providing motivational encouragement, then, of course, change roles – rower to motivator.
* Climb in 500m increments but, when you reach the half way point, 7500m, proceed to return back down through the distances (remembering, on the descent phase, to begin at 7500m).

**Participation Log**

This challenge starts off deceptively easy. I mean, 500 metres of rowing! That’s nothing. But be patient because when you progress into the first green column (see Appendix A), where distances begin to exceed 5,000m, this challenge stands up and we for the first time see it for the goliath that it is.

Before setting sail I hadn’t touched a rower for the best part of year; so to say that I was out of practice would be a colossal understatement. This didn’t pose a problem for my cardiovascular system, as I’d been doing lots of running and Thai Boxing, but the biomechanical readjustment required to such a compact movement made me feel as though I’d been stretched on the rack and for the first two weeks or more I had chronic lower back, ass and hamstring aches. When the DOMS finally dissipated a new, previously unforeseen, problem manifested.

Once I’d progressed seven days into my voyage I took stock of my performances documented on the Row Tracker (see Appendix A). It occurred to me that I was averaging around 1:57 per 500 metres (1:57/500). Consequently I decided to set myself a challenge within the challenge – which was kind of like an *Inception* dream within a dream situation. That sub-challenge, if you will permit me to call it that, was to row all distances under 2 minutes per 500 (2:00/500).

However, this unnecessary foolery led to a nasty ‘anus’ injury that plagued me for the duration of the challenge. Allow me to expound on how said injury occurred. I was competing against a rather game team of competitors over eight thousand metres. I, of course, row continuously whilst they, between the four of them, take turns to complete a 500 metre sprint on the same rower (my handicap is that I get no rest, theirs is that they lose a little bit of time during each changeover). To my astonishment the team cohesion was an example par excellence and after 4k they were over three hundred metres up stream! This simply would not do.

So, like any testosterone fuelled egoist, I plied my ore as if Themistocles himself were cracking the cat o’ nine over my naked sun-baked back. The sweat began to pour profusely down my face; I was moaning and groaning like a wild animal; staring at myself in the mirror like a deranged madman. A burn on the crack of my ass, as if Ray Mears was trying to kindle a fire with the twizzly stick technique, started to ignite and soon a conflagration erupted. I ignored the fire and carried on rowing through the intensifying pain to take the victory (by a mere 100 metres).

I was in for a shock. When I staggered into the shower and the warm water flowed over the three by three inch burn on my bum I honestly thought a cattle rancher had just branded me with a white-hot iron. It was then I knew that I had inadvertently initiated a challenge within a challenge within a challenge. For every proceeding row afterwards was a torturous ordeal which had me fighting battles on three fronts (well, two fronts and one behind).

Now, moving away from my anal injury for just a moment, if we take a look at the row tracker (Appendix A), which you’ll notice chronicles my times, we can see that I failed to achieve my sub-challenge. Row set 21, 10,500 metres, was completed in an average time of 2:06 per 500m (2:06.8/500)! Pray tell, what happened here then? Interesting you should ask – allow me to explain.

The evening before row set 21 I Thai Boxed for two hours at my local club as is my custom. It is my humble contention that no other sport is as physically taxing as Muay Thai Boxing. Consequently, after an hour and a half of vigorously kicking and punching the pads and 30 minutes of full-contact sparring, I am thoroughly fatigued and in desperate need of liquid refreshment. I would usually consume a couple of glasses of coconut water after a session. However, before I went training I was unable to procure a carton due to an apparent ‘national shortage’. But, alas, whilst I was getting thrashed my good lady managed to locate the one and only remaining carton of coconut water in Britain. When I got home I was in desperate need of a drink and so didn’t stop to scrutinise the brand’s nutritional information. After downing the entire carton I showered and went to bed. Could I sleep? Not for the life of me could I enter the Land of Nod, regardless of how hard I knocked. Tossing and turning and cursing I jumped out of bed at 2am and decided, in a fit of sleep-deprived rage, that I would complete that day’s row set.

So there I was 2am Friday morning in my quasi-gym fighting desperately to stay on point. Yet no matter how hard I fought I could not keep the row pace below two minutes per 500 metres and resigned myself to a failed set. A little later on that day, about 4am-ish, I happened to pick up the now empty carton of coconut water to read the nutritional information – that being a hobby of mine. To my shock and horror I discovered that this brand of coconut water was not ‘reduced sugar’ and so I unwittingly consumed a colossal 90 grams of sugar right before tucking up for the night. No wonder I couldn’t sleep!

From failed row set 21 onwards I warmed to this challenge and, paradoxically, felt it was getting easier though the distances were getting greater.

If you now take the time to rest an eye on row set 30 you will notice a numerical incongruity. (Did you look?) Well if you did you might be scratching your head pondering the question: ‘Why did the distance suddenly jump from 14,500m to 21,090?’ I’m sorry to say, there is no logical answer to that question. When I entered the final stages of the challenge I felt that 15,000 metres was not going to cut the challenge mustard. But 21,090 might. Unfortunately it didn’t and I seriously contemplated rowing on to 25,000, though didn’t through fear for my long-term physiological well-being.

The thirtieth and final set is the crowning jewel in this epic challenge and it is my sincere hope that you have a crack at it. An award awaits those who do.

**Post Challenge Outcomes**

* I certainly can say that I improved my rowing performance. Four days after the challenge I attempted a personal best over the 10k. I advanced by a full one second per 500m which saw me achieve a time of 37:17 (1:52:1/500).
* I completed the landmark distance of 21,090 metres. After watching (on YouTube) the Olympic rowing champion Eric Murray cover the distance in a colossal 1 hour 8 minutes (averaging, if you can believe it, 1:37/500), I’ve wanted to have a go myself. This challenge finally offered me that opportunity.
* I think those 257,000 metres collectively reduced my body fat by a couple of percent.
* I’m confident that I could now, with a bit of training, row on until 44,000 metres (a marathon).

**This Concludes the Challenge: Row, row, row your boat**

**Appendix A: 30 Day Challenge Row Tracker**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Row sets 1 to 5 | 6 to 10 | 11 to 15 | 16 to 20 | 21 to 25 | 26 to 30 |
| **500m – 1:40****(1:40/500)** | **3000m – 11:27****(1:54.5/500)** | **5500m – 21:47****(1:59.1/500)** | **8000m – 31:27****(1:58/500)** | **10,500m – 44:22****(2:06.8/500)** | **13,000m – 51:25****(1:58.7/500)** |
| **1000m – 3:37** **(1:48/500)** | **3500m – 13:20****(1:54.4/500)** | **6000m – 23:05****(1:55.5/500)** | **8500m – 32:19****(1:54/500)** | **11,000m – 43:44****(1:59.6/500)** | **13,500m – 52:54****(1:57.6/500)** |
| **1500m – 5:39****(1:53/500)** | **4000m – 15:47****(1:58.8/500)** | **6500m – 24:17****(1:52/500)** | **9000m – 35:16****(1:57.6/500)** | **11,500m – 45:52****(1:59.7/500)** | **14,000m – 55:28****(1:58.9/500)** |
| **2000m – 7:27****(1:51/500)** | **4500m (17:47)****(1:58.6/500)** | **7000m – 27:47****(1:59.8/500)** | **9500m – 37:25****(1:58.2/500)** | **12,000m – 46:25****(1:56/500)** | **14,500m – 57:50****(1:59.7/500)** |
| **2500m – 9:15****(1:50/500)** | **5000m – 19:57****(1:59.6/500)** | **7500m – 29:55****(1:59.7/500)** | **10,000m – 38:52****(1:56.6/500)** | **12,500m – 49:29****(1:58.8/500)** | **21,090m – 1:23:59****(1:59.5/500)** |
| **7500m**  | **27,500m**  | **60,000m** | **107,000**  | **164,500** | **Total distance: 257,590m** |

**Total Distance Rowed: 257,590m**

**Total Time: 15hr, 49min, 44secs**